

CHAPTER IX FROM THE BABYLON OF THE WEST

" **Novi ezpertna ut nulla ibi pietaa, nulla caritas, nulla fidea, nulla Dei reverentia, nullns timor, nihil aancti, nihil insti, nihil aequi, nlhil penal, nihil denique vel humani. Amor, pndor, decor, candor inde exulant.**"—Petrarca, *Epiit. tine triulo*, XVI.

CATHERINE started from Florence towards the end of May. She was accompanied by Fra Bartolommeo di Domenico, Stefano Maconi, Gherardo Buonconti with his brothers, Tommaso and Francesco, and a number of other disciples ; Alessa, Cecca, and Lisa were also of the party. No details have been preserved of the journey, and it is even uncertain what course they took. A local tradition speaks of Catherine passing through Bologna, while a passage in a letter from Giovanni dalle Celle to Fra Giovanni da Salerno seems to show her on her way along the Riviera. In any case, we know from one of her own letters that she reached Avignon on June 18, 1376.

Into this Babylon of the West, the mystical bride of Christ and her companions came as messengers from another world. Avignon had altered but little since Petrarca had invoked the fire from heaven to fall upon it. " I know by experience," he wrote, " that there is no piety there, no charity, no faith, no reverence for God nor any fear of Him, nothing holy, nothing just, nothing worthy of man. Love, purity, decency, candour are banished from it. All things are full of lies and hypocrisy. The voices of angels conceal the designs of demons." ¹ The only change for the better since Petrarca wrote these words was that, instead of a strong pontiff, enslaved to vice and luxury, there now sat on the papal throne a weak Pope, who, in his sincere but ineffectual way, looked for righteousness.

Two days after her arrival, the Pope admitted Catherine to what appears to have been a private audience, only Fra Raimondo

¹ *Epist. sine tituk*, XVI. I₇₈